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## Unusual offshore record of Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis* on Malpelo Island, Colombia, Eastern Tropical Pacific

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Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis* is a highly specialised predator that feeds primarily on freshwater snails of the genus *Pomacea*, but occasionally on other prey (i.e. *Marissa* snails, crayfish and freshwater crabs: Sykes *et al.* 1995). The species is widely distributed in wetlands from Florida to northern Argentina. Although Snail Kite is not considered a long-distance migrant, there are well-supported data concerning dispersal events on the Florida peninsula and between Florida and Cuba (Takekawa & Beissinger 1989, Angehr 1999). Furthermore, in many areas it has established new populations prior to significant changes in the ecological integrity of the wetlands and the appearance of *Pomacea*. Most ecological changes are related to pollution or other strong perturbations, which promote the presence of freshwater snails that live in water highly saturated with organic loads (Angehr 1999, Estela & Naranjo 2005).

Malpelo Island is 1.6 km long, with a max. width of 700 m and max. altitude of 300 m, and lacks any permanent fresh water. The island lies c.380 km off the Pacific coast of Colombia, it is of volcanic origin and is almost completely devoid of plants (López-Victoria & Rozo 2006). Although species richness is low, the island harbours three endemic lizard species, one endemic land crab, and >80 other invertebrates, including two species of land snails (cf. Subulinidae and cf. Thysanophoridae). Seven seabird species breed and 53 other bird species have been recorded, some only as vagrants (López-Victoria & Estela 2007).

During a field trip to Malpelo on 13–17 February 2010, MLV & OK observed six Snail Kites (Fig. 1). They were positively identified by their red irides, white under- and uppertail-coverts, long slender and strongly decurved black bill, longish square tail, and orange-red legs and cere in males (Fig. 1b). The kites started flying around at 09.00 h daily, when air temperatures increased, and remained on or above the summit of the island most of the day. We climbed Malpelo's peaks on four occasions to photograph them and

to document their various plumages. We regularly observed the kites drinking water at a small temporal pond near the summit, at 250 m elevation. During more than eight hours of observations we never saw any of the kites feeding on the ground, but we photographed two individuals carrying land crabs in their talons, which suggests they were feeding on them (Fig. 1c). Five months later (8 July to 4 August 2010) FAE returned to Malpelo but did not observe any Snail Kites.

Recent records of Snail Kites outside the species' previously known range have been related to climatic conditions (e.g., in South Carolina: Dias 2007). However, the greater number of 'accidental' occurrences could also be due to the species' increasing populations, or to a larger numbers of observers over wider areas (i.e. in El Salvador: Herrera *et al.* 2006). Although Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* and Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* have been recorded on Malpelo during the boreal winter and on many other islands (López-Victoria & Estela 2007), this is the first record of Snail Kite on an oceanic island in the Pacific. It also provides an example of how this specialised bird species survives, at least during migration or for short periods, feeding on alternative prey available on remote islands.

Small, highly isolated oceanic islands have low species richness and few, if any, sources of fresh water (Whittaker & Fernández-Palacios 2007), thus Snail Kites are unlikely to establish viable local populations. Requirements for a species to successfully colonise a remote island include, among others: (a) sufficient individuals of both sexes to guarantee genetic variability to maintain the incipient population, (b) sufficient suitable food, and (c) suitable environmental conditions for breeding (Whittaker & Fernández-Palacios 2007).

We consider that the birds we recorded on Mapelo were migrants, probably en route from Central America to South America, which were displaced from the main overland route by a storm or strong winds. Similar, long-distance accidental dispersal of other raptors has been suggested as the main process responsible for species diversification ('migration dosing'; Bildstein 2004). To our knowledge, this record on Malpelo is the longest



Figure 1. Snail Kites *Rostrhamus sociabilis* on Malpelo Island, Colombia: (a) juvenile in flight, (b) adult male at rest with a Nazca Booby *Sula granti* in the background, and (c) female in flight carrying a land crab (Mateo López-Victoria)

movement recorded for Snail Kite, and it illustrates an example of long-distance dispersal to habitat unsuitable for the species.

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## Bismarck Crow *Corvus (orru) insularis* warrants species status

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The crow on Papua New Guinea's Bismarck islands (New Britain and New Ireland, including Umboi, Sakar, Witu, Lolobau, Watom, Duke of York, New Hanover and Djaul) has conventionally been treated as a subspecies of Torresian Crow *Corvus orru insularis* (e.g., Goodwin 1976, Madge & Burn 1994). However, Finch & McKean (1987) and Storer & Eastwood (1991) proposed that *C. o. insularis* is closer to Bougainville Crow *C. meeki* than